



# AESTHETIC TECHNIQUES IN JACK KEROUAC'S *ON THE ROAD*: A STRUCTURAL STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

This present study is entitled "Aesthetic Techniques in Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*: A Structural Study". It purposes to re-evaluate the novel *On The Road* of the contemporary American novelist Jack Kerouac in the present day context. This study explores *On the Road* as an autobiographical novel. It also examines Jack Kerouac's writing system of novelty: elimination of period, use of long connected dash and improvisational Jazz notes. This paper shows that, how Jack Kerouac has employed "Aesthetic Sincerity" in this novel. The aesthetic sincerity is exposed to sincerity in its traditional sense of a congruence of attestations. Aesthetic sincerity applies to the veracity with which, the writer conveys this congruence in a text. This research paper is a narrative, communicative, and linguistic approach to the novel *On the Road*. There is a development and changes in the fiction. The reason for changes is not artistic but logistic and linguistic. It is not an ethnocentric study but it is ego-centric.

**KEY WORDS:** Spontaneous approach, Improvising methods, Aesthetics, Aesthetics of Sincerity, Narrative techniques, autobiographical narration, Self-reflective methods, Jazz aesthetics.

Jack Kerouac was born on March 1922 in Lowell, to French Canadian parents, Leo-Alicide Keroack and Gabrielle-Ange Levesque. Kerouac was an American novelist. He is considered a literary iconoclast with William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, a pioneer of the Beat Generation. Jack Kerouac is recognized for his method of spontaneous prose. Thematically, his work conveys topics such as catholic spirituality, Jazz, Promiscuity, Buddhism, drugs, poverty, and travel. He became an underground celebrity and, a progenitor of the Hippie Movement.

Jack Kerouac's method was heavily influenced by the prolific explosion of Jazz especially the Bop genre established by Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Thelonious Monk. Kerouac included ideas, he developed from his Buddhist studies, that began with Gary Snyder. He referred to his style as "Spontaneous Prose". His prose was spontaneous and purportedly without edits, the primarily wrote autobiographical novels based upon actual events from his life and the people with whom, he interacted.

His novels exemplified his spontaneous approach including *On the Road*, *Vision in Cody* and *The Subterranean*. The central features of this writing method were the ideas of breath, which is borrowed from Jazz music and from Buddhist meditation breathing. The method is improvising words over the inherent structures of mind and language, and not editing a single word. Kerouac's system of novelty is connected with his idea of breath was the elimination of the period, preferring to use a long, connecting dash. As such, the phrases occurring between dashes might resemble improvisational Jazz notes. When spoken, the words might take on a certain kind of rhythm, though none of it pre-meditated.

Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* exists within an ethos, where the possibility of truly sincere communication was unlikely, an ironic subversion of 1950s American culture or an authentic, introspective study of selfhood. The novel *On the Road* is neither ironic nor authentic in its treatment of the issue of the self in regards to other-driven communication. Kerouac imbues the novel's aesthetic with sincerity both in its traditional sense and its new understanding and through the writing style itself. The novel's autobiographical qualities, Kerouac's formal incorporation of Wallace in the *On the Road* exists as a message of irony against the hypocrisies of the fifties. It works to subvert the dominant ideas of the culture.

The music Jazz, and the earnest depiction of the self in writing regardless of its impossibility, the aesthetic of *On the Road* points to its sincerity. Moreover, each aspect of the novel's sincere aesthetic qualities fosters communication. With an other. It echoes the public, and communicative aspect of sincerity. Aesthetic sincerity is espoused to sincerity in its traditional sense of a congruence of attestation and intent. Specifically, aesthetic sincerity applies to the veracity with which the writer conveys this congruence in a text. Ultimately, if an author believes and takes pleasure in what he writes, then his attestations will achieve an aesthetic sincerity. Matthew Arnold states this notion in his poem "A Caution to Poets":

What poets feel not, when they make, A pleasure in creating,  
The world, in its turn, will not take  
Pleasure in contemplating. (1-4).

Here, Arnold contends that, if a poet fails to feel and take joy in his writing, then the reader will not experience a pleasure in engaging it. This idea evidences Trilling's definition of sincerity whereby only through a true feeling can convey a true message. Like Arnold, Wordsworth believes that, aesthetic sincerity begins with a true feeling within the writer. His subject matter and this feeling of engagement is perceptible by readers.

Wordsworth claims that, the impression of an aesthetic sincerity in a text and the belief in the reader that, the author is earnestly invested in his subject can compensate for many formal and stylistic errors within it. The aesthetic sincerity of a work carries the potential to negate the work's technical and formal shortcomings. When such a notion applied to *On the Road*, a work, that has received a wealth of critical disparaging for its stylistic faults, highlights an avenue to ameliorate the work's critical standing. One of the loudest and most prominent critics of the novel *On the Road* was Norman Mailer, who asserts that Jack Kerouac "lacks discipline, intelligence, honesty and a sense of the novel." Likewise, another Jack Kerouac's critic Truman Capote dismissed Kerouac as an author: "That not writing, that typing."

Indeed, the novel's content is espoused to sincerity and anticipates the tactics of the New Sincerity movement. On its surface level, the novel provides a discussion on sincerity. In particular, the novel resonates with traditional sincerity in its aesthetic depiction. On its surface, the novel *On the Road* presents a poetic, energetic, and descriptive prose. Its narrative style, the writing itself resonates with the notion of sincerity through the highly autobiographical nature of the text and its emphasis on the intense revelation of the inner self of the author to an audience. This goal of presenting the self to an audience echoes Trilling's public focus of sincerity. Ultimately, this communicative aspect is beneficial because, it connects rather than isolates. Before understanding the connection of the novel's autobiographical qualities with sincerity, it is vital to understand the nature of autobiography in the novel.

Specifically, Kerouac, according to biographical and historical accounts, hoped to convey in his novel the nature of his true self in relation to the events in the text, whether historical or fictionalized. Kerouac's Sal Paradise is a character and thereby functions as the narrator of the novel, yet the existence of the original edition of the novel intimates that Kerouac intended a much more personal aesthetic. Joyce Johnson in her book on Kerouac *The Voice is All: The Lonely Victory of Jack Kerouac* comments on Kerouac's original intentions for the novel. She states that in 1951 Kerouac originally wrote *On the Road* a "true life" novel and "was ready to give his name to his protagonist and narrator" (15).

Beyond this point, she indicates that Kerouac desired that, this version of himself in the text possess characteristics similar to his own life such as having a working-class upbringing and being from New England. Yet, as Johnson indicates, upon the novel's publication in 1957, Kerouac's publisher forced him to alter several similarities between himself and his narrator: "Due to intense pressure from the legal department of his publisher, Jack had reluctantly disguised not only the names and identities of all the other characters in the book but his own as well, going so far as to turn his mother into an aunt" (15). Ultimately, the character Kerouac intended to name Jack became Sal. However, Johnson indicates that,

Kerouac did not desire this change (15). Thus, in studying the aesthetic of the novel, it is important to recognize Kerouac's original intention for the book's presentation. Namely, he wished his works to be true to life and his experiences and desired that, his characters and narrator reflect that reality.

While it may be argued that, the name changes and alterations in the novel negate any similarities between the narrative and the real world of Kerouac's experiences. The reason behind these changes mitigate such judgment. Kerouac's critic Tim Hunt states in his critical work *Kerouac's Crooked Road: The Development of a Fiction*, the main reason behind Kerouac's alternations to the novel and the name changes in particular was pressure from his publisher. Thus, the reason for the alternations is not artistic but logistic. Kerouac intended for the novel to reflect his experiences and his personhood. If there is no legal issues, publication of the novel would have contained the real names of the people involved Kerouac, Neal Cassady, Allen Ginsburg, and William S. Burroughs. However, it should be noted, that the existence of real names and Kerouac's actual experiences in the novel do not indicate that, Kerouac hesitated to embellish aspects of his experiences:

While, Kerouac clearly exaggerates many of the events in the novel, his intention, is to convey a sense of truthfulness and verisimilitude to the events He actually experienced while on the road with Neal Cassady, to whom he refers in the novel *On the Road* as Dean Moriarty. Thus, the problem in observing the novel as autobiography lies in Kerouac's clear exaggerations in the text. However, the novel bypasses any questions of historical legitimacy through Kerouac's revelation of the self. Critics often bemoan the sense of autobiography in the novel. Kerouac's critic, Johnson acknowledges that in the novel Kerouac "was not writing autobiography in the usual sense." (407) but more of a fictionalized biography of his own self. Hunt echoes this sentiment:

Kerouac is writing a biography of his self-image. Autobiography in the 'usual sense' is unreflexive and anecdotal But biography is reflexive and interpretative. Details of life are selected and arranged according to some principle of illustration. In *On the Road*, Sal is certainly an image of Kerouac but an image which Kerouac uses to measure his own growth. (5)

In this way, the novel functions as both a form of autobiography and biography of Kerouac's self-image. It is a fiction, depict both actual events and real people while simultaneously possessing the artifices central to fiction writing such as narration, plot, characterization, tension, and metaphor.

The novel *On the Road* is criticized as being superficially autobiographical" (5). Hence, when Kerouac's narrator Sal Paradise states his reason for going on the road with Dean: "I was a writer and needed new experiences" (9). Kerouac is not historically recounting his own feelings per se but mediating his self-reflections through his novel's narrators. This mediation of the self through a narrator exhibits the "biography of self-image." Sal is not Kerouac but Kerouac's self-image in the text, ultimately, Kerouac's self-image is determined to reveal its inner nature to the readers of the novel. It is not simply autobiography. The novel *On the Road* possesses traits of a refined sense of autobiography through self-reflection mediated through the narrator.

The topic of autobiography in the novel is pertinent to the discussion of aesthetic sincerity. Trilling establishes between the autobiography and sincere expression. In discussing the sincerity of the self in regards to writing, Trilling contends that the sincere self, through autobiography, wishes to convey interior knowledge of the self to the public. It resonates with the "public end in view" which is central to sincerity. According to Trilling, the genre of autobiography stems from the individual self's need for expression. It is a self "bent on revealing himself in all his truth, and demonstrating his sincerity" (25). In this vein, Trilling asserts that, the rise of autobiography proliferated from the recognition of the self's own individuality and the desire "to demonstrate that which is to be admired and trusted" (25). Thus, the nature of autobiography demands the self believe. It possesses both a level of import and something of significance to communicate. This belief fosters an understanding of the self as an autonomous individual able to engage in meaningful driven discourse. Trilling's thoughts on autobiography are espoused to his beliefs regarding the rise of individualism: "at a certain point in history men became individuals" (24). His notions regarding the sincerity of autobiography transcend the topic of individualism, when viewed under the light of Kerouac's utilization of autobiography in the text *On the Road*. Specifically, Kerouac uses the autobiographical aspects of the novel to foster form of self-disclosure, bent on communicating with an objective: Kerouac's critic Hunt clarifies that, the novel's aesthetic is unique because of its effect in communicating to an objective reader. This technique places the reader closer to the author by removing the mediation between writer, narrator, and reader.

Unlike his modernist forefathers, who elevated their positions as writers to the point of becoming personas, through his highly personal self-disclosure. His incorporation of autobiographical characteristics, Kerouac echoes Wordsworth's edict that poets ought to be "men speaking to men." While not strictly autobiography, as evidenced by Hunt, the novel contains autobiographical qualities, that points towards sincerity through Kerouac's presentation of the self through the Sal Paradise. Kerouac's critic Mary Panicea Carden the *Road* as an "autobiographical novel in which Dean Moriarty, a thinly disguised Neal Cassady, initiates Sal

Paradise (Kerouac) into the traveling life" (85). Unlike Hunt, Carden sees the autobiography possessing a central role in the novel's aesthetic.

However, both Carden and Hunt believe that, Kerouac's central concern is the presentation of his true self within the text. Whether that text is a "biography of his self-image" or an embellished, autobiographical personal history. She clarifies that, earlier versions made no attempt to conceal makers of time and location, not to mention the identities of friends and acquaintances," which eventually resulted in "its present incarnation when Kerouac 'decided to write the novel as if he were answer questions'" (85). Whether direct autobiography or a biography of the self, the topic of confession and self-disclosure is a central concern for Kerouac. Trilling contends that, this topic of self-disclosure is central to form of autobiography: In writing autobiography, the writer must then truthfully reveal himself, if the reader wishes to perceive him as being true to himself and true to his readers.

In autobiography sincerity requires the truthfulness of experience, in the novel, Kerouac seeks likewise to convey the truth of his own experiences. Rather than literal experiences, Kerouac conveys the spiritual experience of an individual's quest for fulfillment with truth. Indeed, Kerouac's focus in the text is self-exploration. But, this presentation of the self is not *in vacuo*. Specifically, Kerouac's focus is not for authenticity and the isolated exploration of the self which devoids an objective reader but for a sincere communication with a reader, and the attempt to facilitate a dialogue between the readers and the text. Novel's autobiographical beginnings, in conjunction with Kerouac's self-disclosure to the reader through Sal, ultimately engenders an impression of sincerity. Kerouac is being true to what "he was and is" (Trilling 23). This truthful communication of the self, senses his truthfulness to others. Thus, where critics have used the novel's autobiographical features as grounds for critique, the existence of these autobiographical factors intimate the work's sincerity.

In addition to the autobiographical aspects of the novel, *On the Road* achieves sincerity through the musicality of its prose. Specifically, Kerouac incorporates Jazz into the novel's aesthetic as a stylistic tactic, conveying the fluidity of life as he perceives it. In the novel, jazz takes center stage in two of Sal and Deans travels to Chicago and San Francisco. The novel mentions jazz in New York, the two most prominent discussions of jazz occur in these two cities. It is George Shearing's "ecstatic face" (128) in Chicago Slim Galliard's "wild jazz sessions" (177) in San Francisco, jazz is a recurring theme. What, Kerouac develops in the aesthetic of *On the Road* is a prose imbued with the musical qualities of jazz, aural pleasure, improvisation, and participation.

Kerouac's jazz aesthetic resonates with the notion of sincerity through its concern with the unmediated presentation of the self to an objective audience. It is a presentation contingent upon the congruence of avowal and true feeling. Interestingly, the feeling of jazz within Kerouac's prose is not a product of Kerouac's frantic writing style but an intentional technique, which he was conscious while writing the novel. James Campbell in "Kerouac's Blues" makes this point: The improvisatory technique that, Kerouac had evolved while revising the long scroll version of *On the Road* he called it 'sketching,' Shaped by his belief that, jazz is the essential American art form, and his feeling that, no one before him had seen the potential scope of a jazz prose. Kerouac's model for this new and self-consciously American melody line was adopted from the tenor man, "blowing a phrase on his saxophone till he runs out of breath, and when he does, his statement's been made." (367)

To Campbell, Kerouac's utilization of jazz in the novel's prose stems from his own beliefs regarding the nature of writing. Kerouac, it seems, believed that the "jazz prose" in the novel would be something unique, revolutionary. The method by which Kerouac infuses Jazz into the aesthetic of the novel is threefold: the treatment of jazz as a language, an emphasis on improvisation, and a desire to foster participation with an audience. Kerouac's treatment of, attention to These areas produce a prose teaming with energy, melody, and unpredictability. Douglas Malcolm's "Jazz America: Jazz and African American Culture in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*" deals specifically with Kerouac's process of jazz incorporation in the novel's form. Malcolm believes that, "a direct transportation of theory and practice from music to literature can be accomplished in the fashion, that Kerouac proposes" (85).

While, he ultimately proposes a reading of the novel, that centers on the connection of jazz and African American culture, his analysis of Kerouac's jazz aesthetic cogently displays Kerouac's fascination with jazz as a formal technique. He argues, "Kerouac's analogy with jazz is exact. Some of the choruses read like scat singing played back at slow speed, words "blown" for their musical values or their primary link to the subject matter" (86). According to Malcolm, Kerouac intentionally chooses language for its musical effect as well as its topical significance.

For this reason, many famous passages in the novel maintain their resonance. Specifically, Kerouac's description of Sal's overwhelming attraction to madness presents these musical qualities. Here, Kerouac's prose develops a melodic cadence and builds a rhythmic tension, that heightens as the sentence goes on. The first clause ending with "mad ones" anticipates the quick succession of parallel phrases that follow "mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved." Likewise, the sec-

ond half of the passage relieves this tension while likewise anticipating another succession of energetic prose. Here, Kerouac relies heavily on the sound of words, and the rhythm he creates slows and hastens much like a jazz solo. Likewise, this passage pays no mind to grammatical correctness. It contains a run on sentence as well as created word, "centerlight." Memorable passages like this exist throughout the novel. To Malcolm, they are predicated on Kerouac's jazz aesthetic. Likewise, this passage resonates with Hunt's ideas regarding a biography of self-image, because the passage expounds upon Kerouac's self by revealing aspects of Sal's character.

In order to imbue the novel's aesthetic with the feeling of jazz, Kerouac must first treat jazz as a language capable of transmuting into a literary text, and the qualities of jazz, in fact, harmonize with the qualities of language. Tenor saxophonist Stan Getz highlights the connection of jazz with language: "It is like a language. You learn the alphabet, which are the scales. You learn sentences, which are the chords. And then you talk extemporaneously with the horn" (Malcolm, 89). While, there are obvious differences in mediums, both language and music function in a Saussurean signifier and signified relationship. In language, the signifier and signified deals with words and their impressions, but in music, the signifier presents a note and the signified is the sound it creates. Malcolm clarifies that it may, be easier to communicate through language than with music. "But while musical improvisation is like speaking a language, the musician alone understands its grammar; although clearly he or she is able to communicate to a listener, the listener is much freer than in language discourse to interpret the sounds autonomously" (89). Thus, there is a level of subjectivity in interpreting jazz, that is present to a lesser degree in language. There is a level to which jazz and language share similarities. The Jazz musicals Alan Perlman and Daniel Greenblatt they agree with Noam Chomsky, "Who points out this similarities: 'Improvising musicians are in much the same position as speakers of a language. Their improvisations are facilitated by their knowledge of the available harmonic and melodic possibilities and by their technical skill and imagination in combining and recombining these possibilities in novel ways' (182). Kerouac seems to be conscious of this connection and incorporates jazz into the language of the text.

In Kerouac's specific application of the jazz aesthetic, he values the characteristic of improvisation as being both central to jazz composition and his formal poetics. Hunt states that Kerouac's "notion of improvisation informs the language of his writing at an exact technical level. Though, Kerouac has neither the knowledge of a musician nor the critical vocabulary of a person learned in the subject of music, he clearly demonstrates a profound identification of the creation of music with that of literary works" (8-9). Beyond jazz, Kerouac himself was a proponent of improvisation and spontaneity in his work. His "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," published in 1958, one year after the release of *On the Road*, contends that, the writer must cast off all external concerns and allow language to take over in the writing process.

Thus, as a general principle in writing, Kerouac was concerned with the notion of improvisation. In the novel *On the Road*, this improvisation manifests in connection to jazz. While, Kerouac does not directly mention jazz in this passage, the connection is logical based on his treatment of jazz in the novel. In a sense, Jazz accompanies the movement of the narrative. Specifically, in their travels, Sal and Dean regularly visit Jazz clubs. Moreover, Jazz informs the novel's central theme: the quest for self-signification by giving the characters a glimpse into the sort of freedom they long for. Sal and Dean's experiences in jazz clubs consistently involve moments of transcendence, when they realize the IT16 that they desire to attain, and the fluidity of jazz, along with its apparent lack of resolution, manifest in the novel's fluidity and improvisational qualities. In this vein, Malcolm writes, "Improvisation is the principal formal rule, which distinguishes jazz from other types of music" (87).

Hence, jazz, by virtue of its very nature, is linked with improvisation. Beyond this point, Stephen Nachmanovitch in *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art* states that all art is, essentially, a variety of improvisation. In a sense, all art is improvisation. Some improvisations are presented as it is. Others are "doctored improvisations," that, have been revised and restructured over a period of time" (6). The creative process involved in producing a work of art necessitates a form of improvisation to some extent. Jazz is entirely spontaneous, while writing is more of a "doctored improvisation," taking place over time and through revision. Kerouac, takes the notion of jazz improvisation further by incorporating it into the novel's sentence structure. Kerouac's sentences may seem longwinded their function resonates with his notion regarding the length of a breath. As Malcolm says "Breathing punctuates his sentences. The primary structure that controls his spontaneity, is the physical dimensions of his writing surface" (91). Kerouac ultimately seeks completely to utilize the duration of a breath, to pack as much substance as possible into a sentence before its completion, much like a saxophonist strives to hit all the notes in a solo, even to the point of exhaustion.

Yet beyond the topics of language and improvisation, Kerouac's jazz aesthetic points towards sincerity in its end of communal participation. Kerouac treats the jazz musicians in the novel as deities: "For Kerouac and his fellows, jazz musicians provided an insider's world of arcane knowledge, that distinguished them from straight society" (Malcolm 99). This sanctification is due to their ability to foster within a large group of people a similar transcendent effect. Malcolm continues, "The characteristic which in Kerouac's mind unites the historic musicians

above all is their 'madness'. The unavoidable implication is that, the music they create derives not from rational thought but from visceral spontaneity" (96). This madness has a collective function in the novel. In opposition to modern, Western music of impersonal concert halls, jazz necessitates interaction with an audience: "The African American culture from, which jazz derived favored communal music, which was participatory, unlike the Western tradition of classical music, which has sacralized the performer and proscribed audience involvement. In jazz clubs, audience and performers were not separated from one another. The audience participation in the music was expected" (Malcolm 103). Malcolm traces this process back to the "call and response" technique of African American slave songs and religious music. In each case the effect is identical and the blurring of the line between performer and audience in favor of a collective experience.

For Kerouac, this collective is experience is a form of frenzy and madness. It also allows for a transcendence and a purity and sincerity of communication. Thus, the participation between the audience and the performer achieves, to Kerouac a true meaningful experience.

In the same way, that sincerity involves a "congruence of avowal and actual feeling" (Trilling 2). The subject of jazz in the novels involves a similar process. The one that, Kerouac mirrors in his jazz aesthetic. Unlike the impersonal, authentic prose of the modernists, Kerouac's prose produces a collective experience within the reader through its aesthetic mirroring of jazz.

The Jazz, as Kerouac treats it, involves first a true feeling within the performer which is produced and refined through improvisation. Beyond this, the participatory nature of jazz ensures a collective response with an audience, functioning as a form of other-centered communication. Hence, the sincere jazz musician will produce his music through congruent representation of his true, internal feelings through his outward melodies. Like Arnold's "Caution to Poets," the jazz musician must truly feel, what he creates in order for the audience likewise to enjoy the performance.

Kerouac mirrors this aesthetic sincerity in his use of jazz as a writing technique. Kerouac positions himself as a jazz musician, incorporating improvisational technique with a linguistic treatment of jazz. Moreover, just as jazz in the novel produces a communal effect through participation. Kerouac's prose similarly invites participation through its incorporation of jazz technique. Kerouac's critic John Leland in *Why Kerouac Matters* discusses the participatory nature of Kerouac's prose through his incorporation of jazz as a view of time. Leland states, "Sal's past and present are variations on the same themes, neither subordinate to the other. He organizes time the way a jazzman organizes successive choruses. (138) Kerouac, in treating jazz as an analogue for time, is able to bypass linear time and value the present. Leland goes on to posit that, through the treatment of jazz as a reference for time, Kerouac invites the reader to reconfigure time in the novel, and, therein, participate with the text.

Thus, in treating the subject of time in the same way a musician treats jazz composition, the novel welcomes both the interaction and participation of the reader in this chronological experience. Leland compares the novel's treatment of time through the jazz aesthetic to the experience of listening to a piece of music.

Thus, like the sincerity of jazz music, the novel's aesthetic is sincere through its depiction of true feeling conveyed through improvisational language to facilitate a meaningful dialogue with readers, encouraging them to participate with the text. Through this process, Kerouac both harnesses jazz as an aesthetic technique and, within the formal qualities of the narrative, mirrors the understanding of sincerity as a "congruence of avowal and actual feeling" (Trilling 2). This is evidenced by the purpose behind Kerouac's technique of improvisation, which is to display that which is "the most painful personal wrung-out" kind of writing (Kerouac, "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose" 58). Thus, Kerouac's aesthetic techniques, specifically the utilization of Jazz through musical nature, improvisation, and aspect of participation, work together to reveal the nature of the self. This presents truthful, real feeling, combined with the intention to foster a dialogue with an *other*, ultimately intimates the sincere nature of the novel's aesthetic.

While, the aesthetic sincerity of *On the Road* is discernable within its autobiographical and formal qualities, the process by which the self is revealed in a text presents difficulties in regards to sincerity. Specifically, the novel's depiction of the self through Sal intimates, that the impossibility of displaying the self in writing. Throughout the narrative, Sal is intent on conveying the exact nature of his thoughts and impressions. Unlike Oscar Wilde's critique of sincerity: "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask and he will tell you the truth" (Trilling 119). Sal wears no mask and exhibits no pretense in his self-disclosure. Unlike Dean and Carlo's futile attempts "to communicate with absolute honesty and absolute completeness everything on their minds" (*OTR* 42). Sal by virtue of his narrative style projects to the reader everything thought, that crosses his mind. However, Sal's honesty encounters a problem in regards to the nature of his self-disclosure. In general, Sal desires to actualize real, tangible meaning within the world and, at least in the beginning of the novel, meets the world a sense of ideal naivety. Malcolm clarifies the nature of Sal's desire: "*On the Road* involves the quest of Sal Paradise for transcendent signification in his life" (102). The question that rises, with regards to aesthetic sincerity how can Sal's language fully convey the nebulous spectrum of the self? Just as Dean and



Carlo are unable to “communicate with absolute honesty” their inner natures, the fixed nature of language, it seems, precludes this sort of total honesty. As Leland notes, in regards to the narrator, the novel concerns “Sal’s search for a voice, one that aspires the personal as well as collective, claiming redemption and forgiveness for all” (48). This task, is far from tenable. As a narrator, “Sal is not one of the mad ones and he often gets tongue-tied.

Hunt sees the novel’s narration as a presentation of the tension “between the enacting of the self as an individual free of society and the possession of identity within and from society” (188), and this tension obfuscates any coherent presentation of the self in the novel. Here, Sal seems to be aware of the shortcomings of language in communicating the nature of the self. While the postmodern emphasis on the slippage of language had yet to take hold upon the novel’s publication, the seeming impossibility of using language to communicate with absolute honesty is implied throughout the text. Kerouac’s repeated use of the word “IT” as an encapsulation of complete meaning.

Kerouac’s use of “IT” seems to be a recognition of the inability of language to convey objective meaning. Kerouac’s presentation of it is not ironic. The novel’s characters earnestly believe in “IT”. It chases throughout the narrative as the object of their desires. In terms of *On the Road*, it appears that Kerouac incorporates a similar sort of earnest irony in Sal’s depiction of both his true self and the esoteric ideals of the characters around him. Sal admits that through his journey, he becomes unable to know even himself. Kerouac seems to recognize in the text. It does not negate the earnestness of Kerouac’s attempt. It is through this fusion of the earnest and the ironic, that the aesthetic of *On the Road* finally points to New Sincerity. No doubt, the structure of the novel *On the Road* aesthetics and sincerity. The aestheticness has become technique as well as structure.

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